

STATEMENT BY THE VICTIM'S FATHER

June 28th of last year, the indictment of four individuals who had brutalized and prostituted my daughter since the age of 13 was announced with great fanfare at a press conference by the Brooklyn District Attorney. For me, her father, her mother, and the other members of our family, this represented the end of a long nightmare. We hoped that this case would shed light upon the legal and psychological issues that accompany this devastating crime. Today, the District Attorney has chosen to discontinue this effort legal battle. It is a decision that was made against our wishes and against our will.

We have maintained our silence at the request of the District Attorney, even as the defense in this case maintained a feverish battle in the court of public opinion. We were told repeatedly by the DA to maintain our silence, not to divulge facts that could be useful to the defense. We were told that our chance to reply would come in court. This is a promise that was not kept.

With our promise of silence now null and void, we now wish to set the record straight with facts that were omitted from press accounts of this case.

First, I became aware of the possibility of the prosecution of my daughter's case in May of last year, almost six weeks before the indictments of Jamali and Jawara Brockett, Damien Crooks and Darrell Dula. During that time, my daughter courageously shared the details of her mental health history, as well as the extent of her "traumatic bonding" with her traffickers, in which she felt fondness and affection that increased in direct proportion to the extent that she was brutalized. All of these facts she was eager to explain in a court of law. Repeatedly, she and I asked people in the DA's office if these facts--facts that could easily be twisted and manipulated by defense attorneys--would stand in the way of their prosecuting the case. Repeatedly, we were assured that the case would go forward, that my daughter was no more to be blamed for returning to abuse than an abused wife or girlfriend.

The press, hand fed a selective menu of leaks by the defense, presented my daughter in the most damaging light possible. Even when she attempted to learn self defense, a logical, therapeutic step for someone who had been gang raped at age 13, it was splashed in the headlines in a sensationalistic and negative way. What the press never focused on or even acknowledged was that every single piece of information they brought to light came from voluminous evidence turned over by my daughter. Presented in context and explained by experts in sex trafficking and domestic violence, the evidence should have been more than sufficient to convict my daughters' traffickers. It also would have enlightened the public on how to protect their children, as well as to expose how traffickers target their victims, "turn them out," put them on the street, and profit from their sale.

One of the most damning pieces of evidence cited against my daughter was a supposed recantation which she had signed. A copy of the so called recantation shows

that it was defaced, and that the words "not true" were crossed out from a statement composed by the detective that was meant to be an admission by my daughter that she had made false allegations. The fact that my daughter purposely crossed out "not true" from such a statement should have invalidated the "recantation." The District Attorney could easily have argued this point, but chose to walk away from this legal battle.

The statement was composed by the detective and written on a form designed by the NYPD to streamline recantations of sex crime allegations. An additional irregularity never made public is that the signature was extracted from my daughter when she was at a hospital, receiving medication intravenously. In this weakened state, she was told by the man who goes by the official title of detective that she could be arrested for prostitution if she did not recant. What is also not mentioned is that this individual, who was on duty wearing an NYPD badge, cursed at her as he left the room with her coerced recantation.

Sadly enough, this incident was only one of many in which my daughter was rebuffed by police when she reached out to law enforcement authorities to obtain protection from the abuse to which she was being subjected. Several of these attempts to obtain protection from the police came when she was well under age and therefore legally unable to consent to sex. Back when my daughter was only 14, at a meeting arranged by Crown Heights Shmira, a neighborhood watch organization, my son and I met with Lieutenant Cantwell and other police officers from the 71st Precinct and voiced our concerns that my daughter was being forced into sex by the Brockett brothers. Despite our reports of serious criminal activity--the repeated rape of a minor--there was absolutely no follow up by Lieutenant Cantwell or any of the other officers from the 71st Precinct who were present at the meeting. In nine years of dealing with the NYPD, I can truly say that a stolen car merits more attention than a stolen childhood in many parts of New York City. The attitude of the NYPD that we experienced towards underage trafficking victims was one of sneering indifference, a response that served only to cover the backs of perpetrators who turn out and prostitute underage girls.

As a result our government's failure to protect her, my daughter spent years in in-patient treatment. She now feels overwhelming sadness about the time she spent away from family, and about the fact that a locked ward was the only place that she could be free of sexual enslavement.

It should be self evident that a young woman who has been subjected to years of physical and sexual abuse would be in need of serious psychiatric intervention. Tragically, what the defense has shown, and what the District Attorney has affirmed, is that a "history of mental illness" is a scarlet letter that in all too many cases deprives its wearers of any legal recourse against those who victimize them.

"Traumatic bonding" is increasingly understood by the legal system in many jurisdictions outside Brooklyn. Unfortunately, Brooklyn remains among the jurisdictions in which traumatic bonding is cited by defenders of traffickers in cases where physical violence and threats are used to keep someone in an abusive relationship that involves

prostitution. Our family has the misfortune of living under the jurisdiction of the Brooklyn District Attorney, who regards the psychological confusion and fear my daughter experienced during her enslavement as proof that she sought out, enjoyed, and deserved her victimization. Brooklyn, a borough in which victims of sex trafficking are numerous, has sent through my daughter a chilling signal to other victims of trafficking who remain enslaved. One legal expert told me that understanding of forced prostitution is today where the understanding of spousal abuse was 30 years ago.

It saddens me and my family that we had to leave our beloved community, one in which people of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups lived side by side and learned to respect our differences and cherish our commonalities, especially our desire to nurture our children. We leave it with a deep sense of empathy for other families that struggle and yearn to reclaim their children from "the street life." Even today, in this hour of defeat, we remain committed more than ever to bringing about the day when law enforcement will treat forcing a child into prostitution with the same horror felt by the average citizen. I personally feel conscripted to fighting this tragic form of human suffering as my life's mission.

We had hoped that Brooklyn would be the place in which a stand would be made against turning a child or a young woman into a dehumanized sexual commodity. This was unfortunately not the case. Despite my daughter's total cooperation, the Brooklyn District Attorney has surrendered against our will and without our consent. We have no doubt that a day will come when a victim of sex trafficking will fight and win in a battle in court. We have no doubt that precinct by precinct, city by city, and state by state, police and the courts will reflect and act upon the natural indignation citizens feel about this heinous crime.

In 1857, the infamous Dred Scott decision affirmed the legality of slavery. In 1865, Juneteenth became a celebration of the freedom Dred Scott never lived to see. Despite today's surrender in Brooklyn, the fight against forced prostitution goes on. I am saddened as a father and as a human being that this decision to drop charges was made. As a Brooklynite, I am ashamed as well.

Women are half of the human race. When women are oppressed by gender violence and inequality, men are diminished as well. Until my dying day, the marketing of human beings as sexual chattel will remain my cause. The dignity given us by G-d is not ours to diminish or to deny others. This struggle will go on. I thank the many people who behind the scenes have assisted our family in coping with this crisis and who have helped my daughter reclaim her freedom and dignity. G-d bless you all and G-d save our country.